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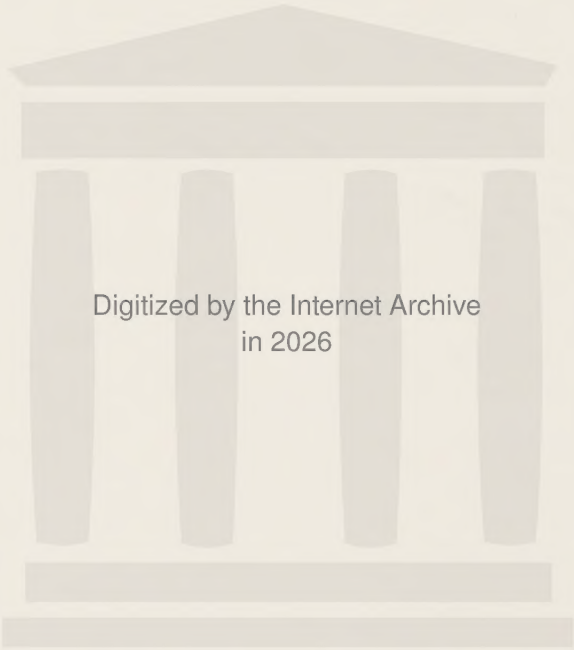
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CREEPERS

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"The content and ideas are
DARK, THRILLING, SPINE-CHILLING, GRUESOME
at times, extremely interesting, and sometimes even hilarious."

—Marla Conn, M.S. Ed., reading and literacy specialist and educational consultant

Doctor Death

by Edgar J. Hyde

Illustrations by Chloe Tyler

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CHAPTER ONE

Basketball Hero

Ever gone to visit the doctor but felt worse afterwards instead of better? Well, that's just what happened to Jacob Jung and a few of his best friends when Dr. Death, as he quickly became known, came to work in their town. Let me tell you what happened...

"Go, Jacob!" Xavier yelled to his best friend as he passed him, changing pace slightly to bounce the ball in Jacob's direction.

Jacob caught the ball as it bounced back up, ducking out of the way of the Merton Valley defense. He jumped, aiming straight for the basketball net. Almost in slow motion, as everyone in the gym

sucked in their breath, the ball gently circled the rim of the net. Jacob could see, from the corner of his eye, Coach Barnes get up from the bench and stand, staring at the ball, almost willing it to drop through the net. It worked, or at least something did, because for the next minute it seemed as though the entire school erupted as the ball finally stopped circling and fell straight through the basket. They had won. Their team had beaten Merton Valley High for the first time in seven years and Jacob had scored the winning basket! Xavier and the rest of the team whooped gloriously, punching the air in delighted victory, everyone grinning from ear to ear.

"Amazing, Jacob! That was just amazing," Coach Barnes said as he slapped Jacob on the back. "Had us on the edge of our seats there, though. Thought the buzzer was going off before you scored. Well done, Jacob. Well done!"

As the losing team left to commiserate with each other in the locker room, the boys reveled in their

victory. Everyone in the gym remained standing, applauding the first team to bring back the state trophy in so many years. Grabbed from behind, Jacob was hoisted on his teammates' shoulders. They carried him around on their victory lap cheering at the tops of their lungs—and Jacob loved every minute of it. He had never felt so special in all his life, and he was determined to savor every moment. He played to the crowd, waving and smiling to them, not caring that his hair was stuck to his head and his face was scarlet and dripping with sweat. As they began their second victory lap, Jacob noticed Emma with some of her friends. Emma Summers, the love of his life, had just witnessed his moment of glory; his five minutes of fame. Jacob gave her a special smile as he passed by. If Jacob could build up the courage and ask her out, he might have a date for Saturday night.

The team stopped at the far end of the court and the boys lowered Jacob to the ground. Still euphoric, but calmer now, they stood proudly alongside the

coach while the principal, Mr. Jenkins, handed the team their trophy.

"Well done, son," he congratulated Jacob. "It's a proud day for us all."

He moved on to the next boy in line and Jacob glanced up at Coach Barnes. He winked at Jacob and nodded his head slowly, in the way someone does when they're proud of what you've just done. Jacob smiled back, straightened his shoulders, and puffed out his chest with pride. He wanted the moment to last forever.

Later, in the showers, there were lots of hijinks as they all had fun splashing one another. Smelly T-shirts, shorts, and shoes thrown into sports bags, the friends walked out of the school gates and started to make their way home. Every second of the game was dissected, discussed, and looked at from every angle. Every basket they'd scored was exaggerated, with players jumping higher, dribbling faster, and scoring points much easier than any other team they'd

ever seen. Though this was far from the truth (the other team was more than a worthy opponent), the boys decided the other team didn't have to be there at all! They ran circles around them! As the boys neared home, the animated group of friends became smaller.

"Bye, Santiago—see you tomorrow," shouted Xavier. Santiago raised his arm in a victory salute and ran happily up his driveway.

"See you guys," said Caleb, bending to tie his shoelaces.

"See you, Caleb," Jacob returned while Xavier and he continued their walk.

"Did you see Emma Summers?" Jacob asked as he turned to look at his best friend.

"I sure did," Xavier replied. "How could I miss her? She was the one who cheered loudest when you scored the winning basket."

"She was?" Jacob asked, looking at his friend to see whether or not he was joking, but his face remained completely impassive.

"Look, Jacob." Xavier stopped and turned to face him. "You've got to ask the girl on a date. I mean everyone knows you're in love with her, everyone except her, that is. I'm telling you, you might as well ask. What's the worst that could happen?"

Jacob sighed. "But what if she says no?"

Having just resumed walking, Xavier stopped again. "Jacob, man, are you kidding me? Look, how many times have we gone over this—you're an okay guy, Jacob, I've never seen any reason before why she shouldn't go out with you, but now, after today?" In a rare show of affection, or perhaps it was sheer exasperation, Xavier punched his friend on the shoulder, "Just go for it, man."

They fist bumped each other and Jacob turned to walk toward his driveway.

CHAPTER TWO

Put on the Spot

"I'm home, Mom," Jacob shouted, dropping his sports bag in the hall. "Guess what?" he went on as he headed for the kitchen. "We won the championship—first time in seven years—and guess who scored the winning basket?"

He heard his mom start to come down the stairs as he got a soda from the fridge.

"Jacob—is that you?" she began. "I hope you haven't left a bunch of dirty sports gear in your bag! Put it in the washing machine if you want it washed. You kids seem to think clean clothes appear magically in your drawers after spending a couple of days lying on the floor. Never seem to

think about washing machines, dryers, and irons, do you?"

Jacob took a bite from a Snickers bar and didn't bother to answer. He didn't need to—his mother answered all her own questions anyway. Carrying the offending sports bag, his mom entered the kitchen.

"What's this?" she asked, waving the bag around in front of Jacob's face. "Dirty sports gear, that's what!" she said. The mother who answered all her own questions!

Jacob turned to look at his mom, vaguely curious to know if he would be allowed to answer anything she asked him today.

"And what's that you're eating? Chocolate! You'll spoil your dinner, Jacob. I don't know why you have to snack between meals. Don't they give you enough to eat at school? Oh, I know, don't tell me, you didn't like what was on the menu, so you and Xavier just ate snacks from the vending machine.

Does that sound right?"

She actually looked at her son for confirmation. Unfortunately, Jacob had too much chocolate in his mouth to answer in the positive or negative, so he just had to let her carry on.

Filling up the washing machine with detergent, she turned the machine on. Straightening up, she spotted the half empty soda can in Jacob's hand.

"Jacob!" she admonished. "When will you ever learn? Chocolate and soda! Your skin will never clear up if you don't stop eating so much junk food."

"I know, Mom," Jacob said, draining what was left of the soda. "But fruit and water just doesn't go down as smooth, you know?"

The washing machine had started its cycle and Jacob walked upstairs to change out of his school clothes.

"Jacob," Mom shouted after him. "Did you hear what I said? I'm taking you to see our new doctor

tomorrow—Dr. Blair, I think his name is—to see if he can do anything to help your skin. I'll pick you up straight after school, okay? And don't, for Heaven's sake, tell him about all the chocolate bars and soda. Let me do the talking."

Let me do the talking? Jacob thought to himself. *Just who was she kidding?* With his mother around, no one else ever got the chance to do any talking, least of all him.

Dr. Blair, eh? he thought. *Well, let's see if you know your stuff.*

CHAPTER THREE

Doctor Popular

The next day, Caleb wasn't at school.

"His mom said he had a—what did she call it?" Santiago laughed. "Oh yeah, an 'upset tummy,'" he finished, doing a passable imitation of Caleb's mom's voice. "When I texted him this morning, that's what she said. Not 'Sorry, Santiago, he can't get off the toilet,' or 'Sorry, Santiago, he has a bad case of the runs,' just 'Sorry, Santiago, he has an upset tummy—too much excitement yesterday probably.'"

Jacob and Xavier laughed too, thinking of all the fun they'd have when Caleb got back to school, making farting noises in class, putting toilet paper

in his backpack, etc.

Jacob sat alone during geography, as it was Caleb who normally sat beside him in that class. He didn't mind one bit though, because he spent all of class staring at the back of Emma Summers's head anyway. He had specifically chosen this seat at the start of the semester. It was the only class he shared with Emma and he had been determined to sit close by her once each day. As the bell rang to signify the end of the period, she stood up to gather her books. She turned to Jacob.

"Congratulations, Jacob. You played great yesterday—you must be really proud." She smiled and waited to see what Jacob would say.

"Uh, thanks," he muttered, rising to his feet. Self-consciously he tugged at his hair, pulling it forward to hide the horrible zits on his forehead. As he stood, he knocked over his chair, which in turn knocked over the chair behind him, then knocked against the desk.

"Sorry, sorry," he stammered, blushing furiously and turning to help whoever he'd knocked over behind him.

The desk and chair were empty, a fact he'd been well aware of earlier, but had forgotten in his embarrassment. Picking up both the desk and the chair, he coughed to cover his unease and turned back to Emma, trying desperately to think of something witty or funny to say. But Emma wasn't there. He was practically the last one left in the classroom, apart from that pathetic little teacher's pet, Jones, who always sat at the front of the class, asking the teacher one thing or another. Emma, beautiful, perfect Emma, was gone.

Sighing heavily, Jacob picked up his books and left the classroom. He could scream. What an idiot! The chance of a lifetime, and he'd blown it. He'd better not tell Xavier, or he'd lose it—and maybe he should! Friday afternoon—second to last period—and he blew what could have been his

first Saturday night date with Emma!

He had no idea what his history teacher said the entire next period. He couldn't stop replaying what had just happened over and over again.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, the bell rang and school was over. As he walked out the front door, he was surprised to see his mother's car parked outside. She honked noisily and signaled at him to hurry up. He'd forgotten! The doctor's appointment! Though he may as well be covered in zits from head to toe considering the way he'd just behaved with Emma. *Great*, he thought as he crossed the road, *my whole face may as well be one huge pimple with white and yellow poison seeping from it...*

"Hi, Mom," he said as he opened the car door.

Checking her mirror and putting the car in drive, Ms. Jung pulled away.

"Hi yourself." She smiled as she turned to look at her son before her smile quickly faded. "And

what's got you down today?"

Jacob shrugged and looked out of the window.

"I was talking to Caleb's mom today. You didn't tell me your team won the championship yesterday and that you scored the winning basket!"

"I did, Mom," Jacob began. "You just weren't listening…"

"I said to Marjorie this morning, 'now isn't that just typical of my son. Never tells me anything that may be important—spends all his time holed up in his room, making occasional trips to the fridge.' Marjorie said herself she probably wouldn't have known either, only Caleb wasn't himself last night, an upset tummy she said, and apparently that's how he gets when he's been overly excited. She said it was the first time you had won the championship in—how many years? Oh, yes, seven, that's right."

Jacob rolled his eyes then resumed looking out the window. He wondered briefly if Emma was

capable of droning on like this. Horrified, he shut the thought out quickly. No, he decided. This trait was exclusive to his mother, surely. This was simply his mom being his mom.

Arriving at the doctor's office, neither Jacob nor his mom could believe their eyes. The parking lot was completely full, and there were cars double parked on both sides of the road.

"Good heavens," Ms. Jung breathed as she circled the parking lot for the third time, "there must be some sort of epidemic. I've never seen the doctor's office so busy in all my life."

Jacob had to agree—even the annual summer fair held at school didn't attract as many people as this—he wondered what on earth was going on.

"Look, Mom! Over there," he pointed out.

"Oh yes! Good eye."

Mrs. Winterman from the bakery had just come out and was getting ready to reverse her car out of the parking lot.

"I wonder what's wrong with her," Ms. Jung thought aloud. "She doesn't look ill to me."

Jacob and his mom were dumbfounded when they pushed open the door of the doctor's office. There wasn't an open seat in the whole place. Mothers with toddlers squirming on their laps were seated beside young women with new babies who in turn sat beside elderly arthritic ladies who clutched their walking sticks to their sides. The normally composed receptionist was rushed off her feet, the phone rang off the hook, buzzers buzzed, and people continuously demanded appointments. As Ms. Jung and Jacob approached the desk, the receptionist was finishing a call.

"Yes, that's fine, Mrs. Collins, Monday at 9:30 a.m." She searched frantically for her pen. Jacob pointed to behind his ear and she looked at him quizzically. She lifted the appointments book and looked underneath that before checking in her pocket. Jacob again tapped the side of his head,

just above his ear.

"Sorry, Mrs. Collins, just a moment. I seem to have misplaced my pen." She touched her hand to the side of her head and at once located the missing object. Smiling her thanks to Jacob, she wrote in the appointment, said goodbye to her caller, and hung up the phone. Pushing her hair back from her eyes, she looked expectantly at Ms. Jung.

"Oh…Jacob Jung," said his mom. "We have an appointment with Dr. Blair at 4:30."

The buzzer buzzed. The receptionist checked her book then leaned forward to shout through the glass partition.

"Mrs. Burns, Dr. Blair will see you now." She watched Mrs. Burns make her way into the doctor's room then turned back toward Jacob.

"I'm afraid we're running a little behind schedule. We've just been so busy, as I'm sure you can see, but if you'd like to take a seat, if you can

find one, that is, I'm sure the doctor shouldn't be too long."

Jacob was about to say they'd come back some other day, but his mother obviously seemed to enjoy sitting around for hours and hours reading out-of-date magazines because she merely smiled, thanked the receptionist, and went off in search of a seat.

Jacob had never been so bored in his whole life. He'd spent the first 15 minutes of his wait trying not to breathe the same air as the twins who sat on his right-hand side. They looked as if they had a bad case of chickenpox, and Jacob certainly didn't want to catch that. He had more than enough spots as is!

After that, he tried to work out on average whether he'd eaten more Snickers or Twix bars that week. (He was learning all about averages in math and tended to practice the theory on just about everything, including how many visits he paid to

the bathroom in a period of one week!) It was no use, though. He couldn't remember whether he'd had a Twix on Wednesday or if that had been the day he'd deviated altogether and had a Milky Way. Keeping up with his chocolate-eating habit was exhausting. He was anticipating cutting a lot of sugar out of his diet after this appointment.

He glanced at his mom and wondered if it was worth suggesting they leave. She was chewing her left thumbnail the way she always did when she was concentrating on something. Leaning closer, Jacob was able to see she was immersed in an article. No point in suggesting leaving then. He sighed, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. It was getting hot in here now, too. He pulled at the collar of his sweatshirt. He'd have to take his jacket off soon.

"Don't fidget, Jacob," Ms. Jung said absentmindedly, never taking her eyes from her magazine.

Jacob wished they kept this waiting room stocked with more magazines or books that he would like. The doctor's office had become memorable to him because his mother always assured him there would be something to keep him occupied. But he only ever found books for children and magazines for his mother.

"Jacob Jung," called the red-faced, exhausted receptionist. "Jacob Jung, Dr. Blair will see you now."

His mom sat up with a jolt, her front teeth going right through her thumbnail as she did so. "Dang it," she murmured involuntarily. Then, straightening her skirt, she smiled apologetically at the people she pushed past. And with Jacob just behind, she entered Dr. Blair's exam room.

CHAPTER FOUR

Doctor Perfect?

"Ms. Jung, how nice to meet you." Dr. Blair got up and walked toward them, his hand outstretched toward Jacob's mom.

"And you must be Jacob." He smiled at the boy, still holding onto Ms. Jung's hand.

Jacob looked at his mother, noting that she didn't seem to be trying too hard to disentangle herself from the doctor's grasp.

"Please, take a seat," the doctor continued, as he finally let go of Ms. Jung's hand and closed the door. "What can I help you with today?"

Ms. Jung was gobsmacked. Now she knew why the waiting room was busy. This guy was drop-

dead gorgeous! At least 6 foot 2 inches tall, a head of unruly dark hair, and the most piercing blue eyes she'd ever had the pleasure of looking into.

Jacob nudged her sharply with his elbow.

"What? Oh, sorry, Dr. Blair—did you ask me something?" muttered Ms. Jung.

Shifting in her seat, Ms. Jung cleared her throat and tried to concentrate on what the doctor was saying instead of staring into his deep blue eyes.

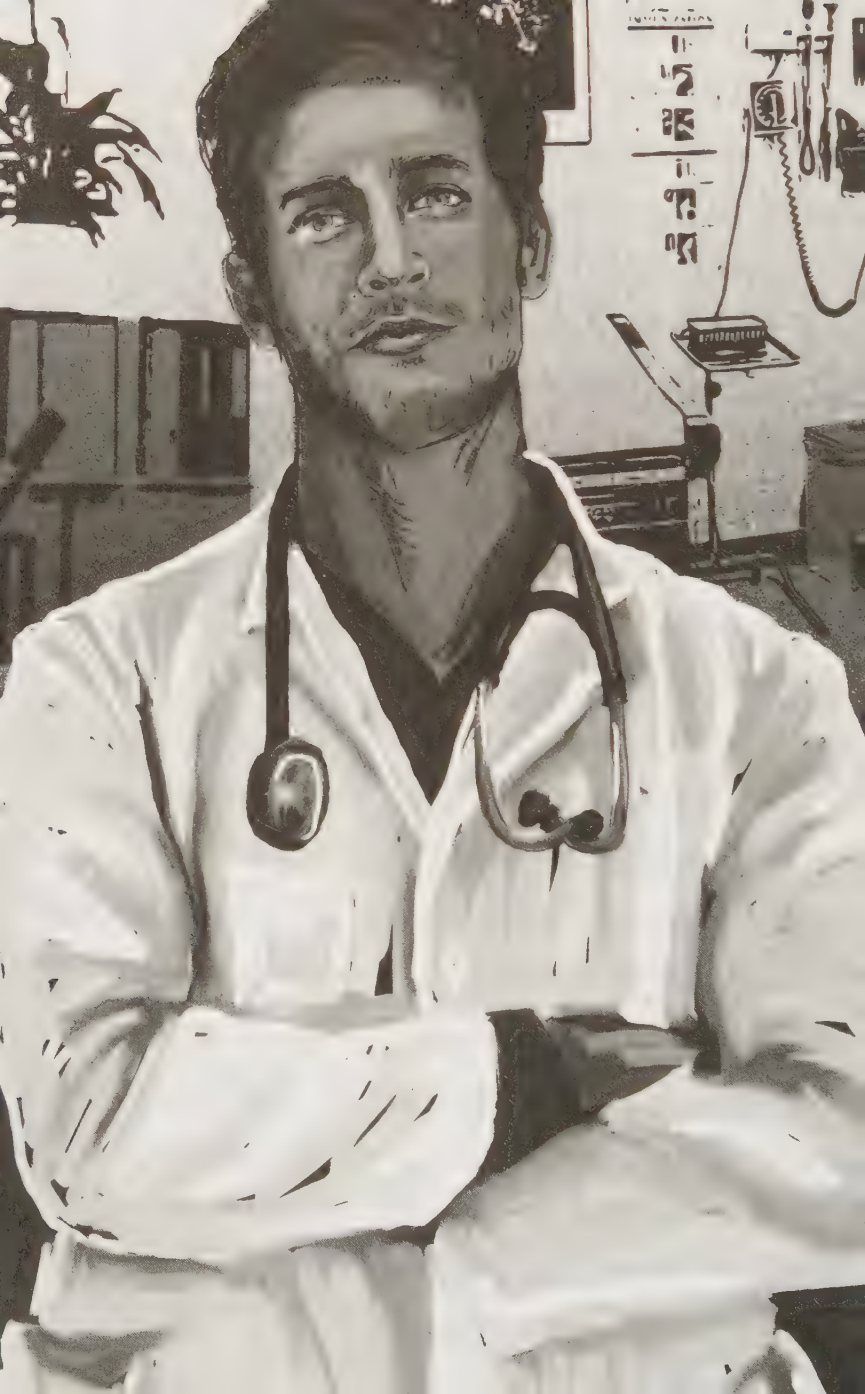
Dr. Blair smiled a slow, lazy smile which lit up his whole face. Eyes twinkling, he picked up his pen before opening Jacob's file.

"What exactly can I help you with today?" he repeated, looking from Ms. Jung to Jacob, then back again to Ms. Jung.

Gathering her composure, Ms. Jung leaned over Jacob and pushed his hair back from his face.

"It's his skin, Dr. Blair. Pimples, you see, lots of them."

"There aren't that many, Mom." Jacob flushed.



Ignoring him, his mom went on. "They can get a lot worse than this, and sometimes his whole face is affected. I just wondered if there was any cream you would recommend he should use, other than the one he has right now. He can be a bit sensitive, you know, at his age, starting to get interested in girls, though he pretends otherwise, don't you, Jacob?"

She smiled and winked at Jacob, as though they shared some sort of special secret. That was it. The ultimate embarrassment. Jacob wanted to die. First his mother went all silly over the new doctor, then he had to sit there while she exposed all his zits, and now she told this stranger that he was crushing on girls! Jacob turned bright red, knowing as he did it only made his zits stand out even more!

Dr. Blair got up and came over for a closer look, though Jacob thought he could have seen perfectly well from the other side of his desk, especially since his pimples felt huge at that point. Dr. Blair bent

down and peered closely at the mortified boy's forehead.

"Ah, yes," he mumbled. "Just a mild form of acne. Nothing we can't deal with here."

Acne! thought Jacob. *Acne! Old Doc Feldman hadn't said it was acne! Just some teenage pimples, he'd said. Not acne! How terrible! He couldn't tell his friends about this! What if Emma found out? She'd never go out with a boy with acne, school basketball hero or not! He'd have to keep this very quiet.*

He turned to hear what the doctor was saying, at the same time making himself a silent promise never to snack on chocolate or drink soda ever again.

"No need to go to the pharmacy—I have some ointment already made up here, Ms. Jung," Dr. Blair was saying. He took a small tub of clear ointment from his drawer and placed it on the desk in front of him. "There you go, Jacob. Simply rub that on your acne every night before you go to

bed and you'll soon see a remarkable difference, I promise."

Ms. Jung lifted the tub and put it into her purse. "Thank you so much, Dr. Blair. You've been very kind. Should we make another appointment to come back and see you, you know, just to see how he's progressing?"

She put her head on one side as she stood, and her voice sounded silly and squeaky as she spoke.

Jacob wanted to throw up. His mother liked the doctor! She was a complete embarrassment. She always did the head-on-one-side-squeaky-voice thing when she liked someone. He'd seen it all before and each time it made him cringe.

"There shouldn't be any need, I don't think," replied the doctor. "But if you feel another visit is necessary then, yes, I would be delighted to see you again."

He opened the door and shook Ms. Jung's hand and started guiding her toward the door.

"It's been a real pleasure," he told her. "See you again some time."

"Thank you, Dr. Blair, thank you," Ms. Jung gushed as she almost tripped over a toy lying on the waiting room floor.

People out here are going to think he performed lifesaving open heart surgery on me the way she's going on, Jacob thought as he too started walking out of the room.

"Pimples, Jacob?" The doctor spoke softly. "You ain't seen nothin' yet," Dr. Blair continued. Then, pressing his buzzer, he asked for his next patient to be sent in.

"What did you just say?" asked Jacob, who thought he must be hearing things.

Jacob turned around to look at Dr. Blair. His face was like stone now, the twinkly smile gone.

"I said close the door. You're letting in a draft."

CHAPTER FIVE

Spot the Difference

Jacob threw an apple core into the trash can. He'd resolved firmly in his mind now that he was turning over a new leaf. No more junk food! He also put on his prescribed ointment every night. He was determined to rid himself once and for all of his pimples and determined not to pay another visit to Dr. Blair's office ever again. Today had been absolutely humiliating for him. If his mother wanted to see the attractive doctor again, she could go on her own. Jacob certainly wouldn't be accompanying her, that was for sure. And what was that the doctor said while Jacob was leaving?

Jacob didn't know whether he was imagining

things or not but even if he had imagined what the doctor's parting words were, he certainly hadn't imagined the look on his face. *It was a complete change from when Mom was around,* Jacob thought as he unscrewed the lid and dipped his finger into the ointment.

"Here goes nothing," he told his reflection as he began rubbing the cream onto his forehead. "Do your worst, Dr. Blair!"

Reaching out of bed the next morning, Jacob shut off Tina Belcher's voice on his alarm clock. He yawned sleepily and snuggled back under the covers. *Just another ten minutes,* he thought, as he did every morning, knowing full well that his mom would wake him if he didn't come down for breakfast on time. Cocooned like a caterpillar in his duvet, he allowed himself to wake slowly, letting thoughts of what today would bring creep into his head.

It's finally Saturday, he thought happily. *I'll do my paper route, come back for a huge breakfast, then meet Xavier and the rest of the gang for some serious hanging out at the mall. Might even spot Emma down there if I'm lucky. Acne!* he thought, suddenly alert. *I forgot about the ointment. I wonder if it's worked yet!*

Jumping out of bed with a crash and causing his mother to yell from her position cooking breakfast downstairs, he rushed over to his dresser mirror for a look. He gasped.

"What the—I can't believe this! No, no!" he shouted. "Mom, come up here, you have to help me, Mom. Come quickly, please."

Ms. Jung took the stairs two at a time. *He must have fallen when I heard the crash,* she thought. *I assumed he'd just been messing around as usual. Dear Lord, he's probably cracked his head open on the bedside table.*

"Jacob," she said as she flew into the room.

"What is it? What's wrong?" She stopped in her tracks. The boy was fine, kneeling in front of his dresser mirror without a scratch in sight.

"Jacob Jung," she admonished, sitting on the edge of his bed to catch her breath. "You scared me! I thought there was something wrong, or that you'd fallen and hurt yourself."

"Wrong! Wrong! Of course there's something wrong! Look at my face, or what's left of my face! You know the expression, 'can't see the forest for the trees,' well try 'can't see the face for the pimples!'"

Ms. Jung looked more closely at her son. "Oh, yes," she agreed. "I see what you mean. There are a few more this morning. And what's that one on the bridge of your nose—is that pus oozing out of it?"

She bent forward to touch Jacob's face, and he pulled away quickly.

"Don't touch them, Mom! You'll make it worse!" He turned back to the mirror, horrified.

A few more! Well, if that wasn't the understatement of the century! Yesterday's cluster of red pimples had now multiplied, and it wasn't just his forehead that was affected. He had a sprinkling on either cheek, the offending one on the bridge of his nose, and the ones that had always been on his forehead had doubled in size and filled up with alternating pockets of green or yellow pus! He simply couldn't believe his eyes.

"I can't go out looking like this, Mom. Young children will scream, cats and dogs will run away in fear, my friends won't want to be seen with me, and what if I see Emma!"

Horrified at the prospect of coming face to face with the girl he had eagerly looked forward to seeing just a few minutes earlier, Jacob shook his head in dismay. His mother reached out to pat his shoulder comfortingly.

"Jacob, Jacob, calm down, come on now. It's not as bad as you think. Once you've washed your

hair and dried it over your forehead the way you usually do, it won't look half as bad, honestly."

"It's that new cream," Jacob said disgustedly. "I should never have listened to you and that new doctor. My skin wasn't this bad yesterday and look at me now—I look like I just spent four hours in make-up getting ready for a part in a Freddie Krueger movie!"

Mr. Jung suppressed a smile and picked up the tub of ointment.

"Listen, Jacob," she said softly. "It says here on the side of the tub 'may make condition worse before any improvement is seen.' You see— 'worse before it gets better'—your granny used to say that, don't you remember?"

"Yeah, I remember," Jacob said huffily, "only I thought it was just another old wives' tale."

"Well, there may be some truth to this one," said Mr. Jung as she placed the tub back on the dresser. "Look, Jacob, try and see the bright side

of this. It's Saturday, right? You apply the cream again tonight, and then you'll have the whole day Sunday to mope around the house looking blotchy and feeling horrible. Then you apply the cream on Sunday night and, presto, Monday morning you get up for school with the clearest, most zit-free skin in the world! You'll have the worst days at home over the weekend and the better days back at school with your friends."

Jacob looked at her hopefully. "You really think so, Mom? You think that's what'll happen?"

"Well, it's possible, isn't it?" his mother answered, hiding her crossed fingers behind her back. "Come on, let's go. You've got a paper route to do. And no buts!" She put her fingers to her son's lips, stopping his protests. "You do not look nearly as bad as you think, Jacob, and half the world's still asleep anyway. Go on, go and get showered and off you go. I'll have a huge breakfast waiting for you when you get back, so go work up

an appetite! Go! Go! Go!"

Jacob walked to the bathroom, turned on the shower faucet, and started to hum a little tune. Mom was right. He had all weekend to get rid of the pimples, and the prospect of getting rid of them completely was almost too staggering for words! Maybe he should apply the cream more often than just once at night. Yes, that's what he'd do—he'd apply it once every few hours just to speed the process. He let the hot water run over his hair and down his back. He could hardly wait until Monday morning!

Arriving at the mall later that day, Jacob was both surprised and pleased to see Caleb there with Santiago and Xavier.

"Hey, Caleb," he called. "How ya doin'?"

Caleb turned toward his friend and smiled weakly.

"Geez, you look awful," said Jacob, aghast. And

he was right. Caleb's face looked thinner somehow, his eyes seeming to sink deep into their sockets, and his pallor was distinctly on the gray side.

"Thanks, Jacob, you sure know how to make a guy feel better!"

"Sorry," said Jacob. "I didn't mean to…it's just that you normally look…"

Caleb held up his hand to quiet his friend. "It's okay, Jacob, really, it's cool. I know how I look. I don't feel that great, either, I have to admit, but don't tell my mom I said that—I had a hard enough time persuading her to let me come out today as it was!"

Jacob and the others nodded sympathetically. They knew what their own mothers were like after all.

"Anyway," Caleb continued, "yesterday was awful. In fact, it got so bad that Mom put me in the car last night and took me over to see the doctor—the new guy, you know, Dr. Blair? So, he

checks me out and gives me some bottles of stuff I have to drink three times a day. Says that should make me feel better. Strangely enough, though, I've had two bottles today already and I can honestly say that I'm actually feeling worse!"

"Now that is weird," began Jacob, "'cause I saw Dr. Blair yesterday, too. Strange guy. I couldn't make my mind up whether or not I liked him, though my mom didn't seem to have the same problem."

"Oh, not yours too!" said Caleb. "I wanted to puke the way my mother was acting. She fluffed up her hair and was trying to flirt with him—gross."

"I know exactly what you mean," said Jacob in agreement. "Sort of behavior you'd expect from a teenager. So, anyway, Dr. Blair gave me some ointment to put on my acne and told me to apply it every night. But when I woke up this morning…" he broke off and looked at Caleb. "Caleb—you okay?"

"I'm fine, Jacob," Caleb managed to say through clenched teeth, his face contorting with pain. "I just have to go to the bathroom, that's all. I'll be okay."

Clutching his stomach, Caleb started to move away in the direction of the escalator that would take him to the toilets located on the lower level. Unfortunately, the guys were treated to the unwelcome stench of some gas that had escaped before Caleb moved away.

"Oh man," said Jacob, holding his nose dramatically. "Let's get out of here."

"We'll meet you at the Donut Diner," shouted Xavier as the three moved away. "Maybe your mom was right about you staying away from sugar, Jacob. Your face does look pretty awful today."

"Thanks, Xavier. I can always rely on you to boost my confidence just when I really need it!"

CHAPTER SIX

A Turn for the Worse

On Monday morning when Xavier arrived at Jacob's house to pick him up for school, Jacob stuck his head firmly under the covers and refused to come downstairs.

"He's still in bed, Xavier," said Ms. Jung. "Go up and see him if you like."

"Thanks, Ms. Jung, I will," said Xavier, brushing past her to go upstairs. Ms. Jung stepped back against the wall. What on earth was that smell?

"Xavier, have you stepped in dog poop? Let me check your shoes."

Xavier stopped and showed her the soles of

both of his shoes. Clean. Turning his face away, he muttered. "It's not my shoes, Ms. Jung. I wish it was."

There it was again, that same smell. Maybe it was coming from outside. She opened the door wider to go check, and Xavier took the opportunity to climb the stairs to Jacob's room. Jacob was still under the covers when his friend came in.

"Go away, Xavier. I'm not going anywhere today, or for the rest of my life for that matter. I look like something out of a horror movie now."

Xavier sat on the bed beside his friend. "I know what you mean, Jacob, and believe me, the best place you could be right now is underneath the covers and away from the smell of my breath!"

This statement caused Jacob to move slightly, though not enough for him to stick his head out from his hiding place.

"What do you mean, Xavier?" said Jacob in a

muffled voice. "What smell?"

"If I mentioned the name Dr. Blair to you, you might understand what I'm about to tell you."

More movement from under the covers.

"My mom was going to the doctor on Saturday afternoon and I went with her, mostly out of curiosity after what you and Caleb said about him," began Xavier. "And you were right. He was Mr. Perfect, in Mom's eyes anyway. She thought he was totally hot, and I think, judging by the number of people in the waiting room, that so does half the town. Anyway, he deals with Mom's problem then turns his attention to me. 'And what about you, young man? Is there something I can help you with?' he says. So, just as I'm about to tell him I'm fine, Mom butts in and tells him about the wart on my foot. I mean, I've had the thing for forever, I'm treating it myself with wart ointment and it isn't even a problem. Between you and me, though, I think Mom just wanted to prolong the

visit and spend as much time as she could drooling over this guy.

"When I tell him what I've been treating my foot with, he says he has a better cure and gives me a small bottle of pills. 'Take two of these a day,' he tells me, 'and before you know it your problem will be solved.' So I did, Saturday and Sunday, then last night I started to notice it—the smell I mean." He sighed wearily. "Jacob, come on, take your head out of the covers. I promise I won't laugh. I've got serious problems of my own, believe me."

Slowly, Jacob sat up in his bed, revealing a face now almost completely covered in huge red, yellow, and green spots.

Xavier let out a long low whistle. "Wow, man, he sure did a number on you."

Jacob dove straight back under the covers. "Geez, Xavier, you weren't kidding about the smell. Can you open my window, please?"

Offended, though totally understanding Jacob's

request, Xavier opened the window as far as it would go. "Okay, Jacob, it's open. I'll breathe out this way if you want to come out again."

Jacob popped his head back out of the covers.

"What did you mean by 'sure did a number on you'?" Jacob asked.

"Dr. Blair, Jacob, that's who I mean. Don't ask me why, 'cause I don't have an explanation, but this guy's out to get us. You, me, Caleb—look at us—each afflicted with something awful and embarrassing immediately after going to his office. My breath smells so gross it's almost as though he's transferred the smell of my feet after being stuck in my shoes through a whole basketball game into my mouth. Your mom thought I'd stepped in something when I came in. It's so bad."

Jacob couldn't dispute that. Despite his window being opened fully, he was glad when his friend stopped talking and therefore stopped spreading the horrible smell of his breath around the room.

"And another thing," Xavier continued. "I met that teacher's pet Jones on my way over here and he was reeking of BO. I know he's a nerd and all, but he never had BO before. And I saw him at Dr. Blair's office on Saturday night, so if that doesn't tell you something then I don't know what will!"

Jacob shook his head in disbelief. "But why, Xavier? Why would a doctor want to give people ailments, instead of trying to cure them?"

Xavier shrugged. "I don't know, Jacob, it doesn't make any sense to me either. What I do know though is that Dr. Blair isn't the nice gentlemanly type he would have our mothers believe."

Jacob remembered the doctor's parting words to him on his visit, when he thought he'd merely misheard. He repeated the words to Xavier.

"'You ain't seen nothin' yet.' And, boy, was he right!" said Jacob, stealing a quick glance at himself in the mirror. The two boys sat in silence for a few minutes, each with their own thoughts.

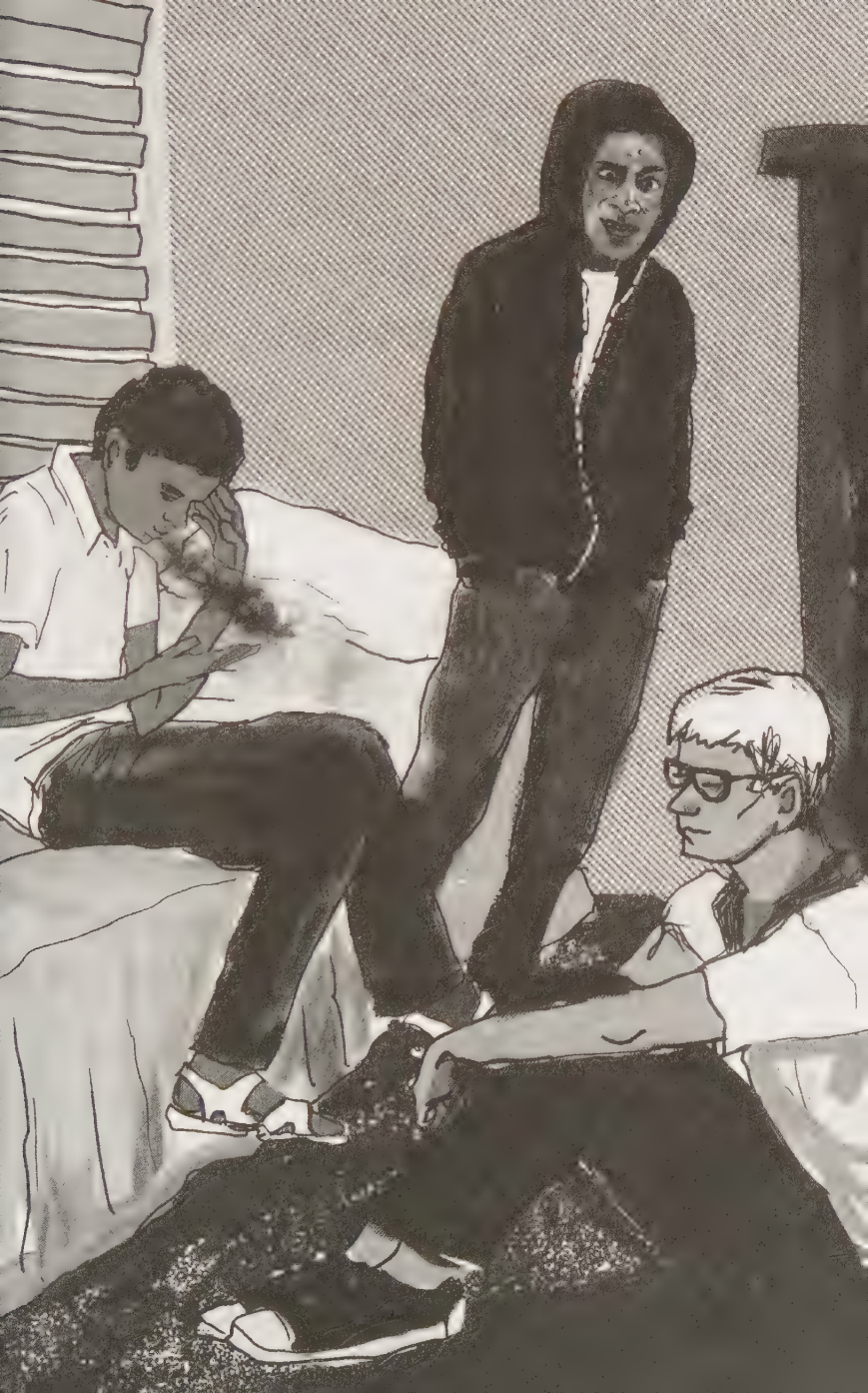
"Tell you what," said Jacob eventually. "Mom thinks I should go to school today—who's she kidding—so let's pretend like we are going to school but go visit Dr. Blair instead and see if we can find out just what he's up to. I'll take a quick shower and we'll go."

Just as Jacob got out of bed, his bedroom door opened, and Caleb and Santiago entered. Caleb looked as though he had no color left in his skin as he sat down very gingerly on the bed. His many visits to the bathroom had caused him to become somewhat "inflamed" as his mother put it. "Raw" was how Caleb would have described it.

"What's that weird smell in here?" Caleb croaked as he looked at Jacob. "I know it's not me—I just got here."

Xavier turned from the window. "I'm afraid it's me guys, and I'm afraid you're gonna have to put up with it until we can all find cures for our ailments."

"I'm going to take a shower," said Jacob as he left the room. "I'll leave Xavier to fill you guys in on what we've been discussing."



CHAPTER SEVEN

Hatching a Plan

The four boys made their way to the local park, taking a long detour around the school, hoping not to be spotted by any teachers, or parents for that matter. No one seemed to be around, so they headed for the gazebo. Having frequented the gazebo for years, they also knew they'd be fairly safe from any unwelcome, prying eyes.

They sat cross-legged, Caleb grimacing as he sat beside his friends. Before, the others would have laughed at their friend's misfortune, but having been afflicted themselves, they were sympathetic.

"Okay, guys," Jacob began. "We have to form a plan to find out just what this so-called perfect

doctor's up to. And to rid ourselves of these ailments. I mean look at us—you'd never find four guys worse off than we are now. I guess you might be all right, Xavier, if you could learn sign language and keep your mouth shut for the rest of your life."

Xavier managed a wry smile. "Yeah, right, Jacob. I know how bad it is. And I want it sorted out. We have to find out what this guy's up to, what sort of medicinal concoction he's given each of us, and if there's any way of reversing the process."

The boys nodded in agreement.

"Okay," said Santiago, "here's what I think we should do. There's no point in going to the office now—you know how busy it is every day. We really need to go there after business hours, sneak in somehow, and see what's up."

"You're right," agreed Caleb. "We'll have to go later tonight when things are a bit quieter. I want to get Dr. Blair back for what he's done—make

him pay for all this suffering."

"That's what we'll do then," said Xavier, "but if we're going to stay here all day, we'll need some snacks—we're bound to get hungry."

"I'll go," said Caleb, getting to his feet. "I have to go to the bathroom anyway, so I'll go to the store and buy some chips and stuff."

"I'll go, too," said Jacob.

The boys emptied their pockets and gave Caleb and Jacob what money they had.

"I hate to tell you this, Santiago," Caleb said as he turned to leave, "but I think you just grew another wart on your chin!"

Jacob and Caleb left Santiago to groan and touch his face to find the new wart. As they passed the park gates, they saw a girl in the distance stop in front of the school entrance.

"Is that Emma Summers?" asked Caleb.

"What? Where?" Jacob hoped he heard it wrong. He could not bare the idea; Emma seeing

his skin in this state.

"Parking her bike over there."

She looked to be the last arriving for school, standing at the rack beside the door closest to the road the boys were on.

"No! Not now! She can't see me like this!"

As they neared her, she raised a hand to wave. Jacob was sure if they came any closer, she would notice his acne. He tried to swerve to take the street around the school building but changed directions too fast. He walked face-first into the bushes, bumping his head and scratching his already sensitive face on the branches. Emma stood staring, letting her arm drop as though she had forgotten it was there.

"Emma! Don't mind him, he just saw a flower he wanted...in the bush..." said Caleb.

Jacob appreciated Caleb's efforts to cover for him, but doubted Emma believed them.

"Oh, is he okay?" she asked.

Jacob nodded frantically from the bushes as Caleb glanced over his shoulder at him.

"Yeah," said Caleb with uncertainty. "And he got the flower!"

Having returned and spent the rest of the day in the gazebo, with poor Caleb making frequent trips to the bathroom (and reporting sightings of children he knew sporting huge cauliflower ears they had not previously had), the four boys all dropped their backpacks off at home, pretending to their mothers they'd had perfectly normal days at school.

They met up again at the top of the road leading to the doctor's office and walked in silence toward Dr. Blair's practice. The flustered receptionist was just leaving and about to lock the outer doors when she saw the boys approach.

"Is the doctor still inside?" Jacob asked anxiously.

"Yes, he's still there. But I don't think he'll see any more patients tonight. He's had a thoroughly exhausting day—as have I. Maybe you boys could come back tomorrow?"

Xavier shrugged. "It's okay, nothing that can't wait. We'll come back some other time, eh guys?" he winked conspiratorially at the others.

The receptionist smiled and finished locking the main doors. "Bye then," she said, walking toward her car.

She unlocked the driver side door, sat down, and carefully checked the sole of each shoe. *Strange*, she thought. *There was a strong smell of dog poop back there—I thought maybe I'd stepped in something.*

"His room light's still on," said Santiago. "He's probably planning even more horrors for any kids who come in tomorrow. We've got to find a way in there."

Circling the building, the boys couldn't believe

their luck when they discovered an open window.

"Quick!" said Jacob. "Help me up. I'll go in and wait until he's gone, then I'll have a look around and see if I can come up with anything. You guys stay here and see if you can find anything out from him when he leaves. Make sure he knows we're onto him—maybe if we back him into a corner he'll panic and tell us everything!"

The three friends, having watched Jacob climb inside the office, walked around outside, chatting casually, kicking empty cans around, and generally trying to behave as normally as teenage boys do. They walked around to the front of the building and saw that the light was now off in Dr. Blair's room. The three sauntered over to lean against his car, looking up casually as the doctor locked the office door behind him.

"Get away from my car," he admonished as soon as he saw them. "Pests. I knew it the minute I set eyes on you."

Drawing closer to the boys, he grinned at Santiago, or rather, at Santiago's warts.

"The medicine's working, I see," he said, obviously pleased. He turned to Caleb. "And how's Caleb—still got the runs, boy?" Reaching into his pocket for his car keys he murmured almost to himself, "Never lets me down, that one, always works like a charm."

"So, you're admitting it, then?" asked Xavier. "You did this to us deliberately. But why? Why would you want to do such a thing?"

"Oh wow." The doctor recoiled. "A bit too successful, that one," he said, covering his nose and taking a step backwards. "That really is the worst smelling breath I've come across in a long time. Won't be very popular with anyone smelling like that, now will you?"

Caleb pulled at the doctor's sleeve. "You've got to give us something to counteract these effects, doctor, please—can't you see how much we're all

suffering? Look at us!"

Dr. Blair disdainfully brushed Caleb's hand from his coat sleeve as he climbed into his car. "How dare you touch me?" he hissed. "And don't tell me I have to help you! Why do you think I did this in the first place? I enjoy seeing your suffering. Do you really think I'm going to spoil my fun and reverse the process? You can't be serious!"

"We'll tell our parents—we'll go to the police, expose you!" sputtered Santiago, enraged.

Dr. Blair fixed his gaze on the boy.

"Santiago—ah yes, your mother was quite interested in me, if I remember correctly, as was yours, Xavier, and yours, Caleb—do you really think they'd believe I would do anything to harm their precious children, especially afflicting them with ailments as peculiar as these? I think not, brats! But don't worry—the potions will wear off in a few years." He laughed a cold, chilling laugh which hung in the air.

Turning the key in the ignition, he rolled down the window. "Believe me, boys, I'm living proof. I used to be ugly when I was your age, covered in all manner of pimples and warts, but just look at me now! Women who wouldn't have spared me a glance when I was a teenager are now swooning all over my office. Eat your hearts out, kids!" He looked at each boy in turn. "Take this as a warning. You better back off. I can get really nasty, and believe me, you don't want to know what that looks like! If I were you, I'd just be grateful I only gave you minor afflictions. They're not exactly life-threatening—yet!"

He pressed his foot on the gas and laughed his maniacal laugh again as he drove off. They watched as his car disappeared down the road ahead.

"He deserves to look just like all of us," Caleb said.

"Life-threatening?! Life-threatening?! How dare he!" said Santiago.

"Calm down," said Xavier, patting his friend's shoulder reassuringly. "We'll sort this whole thing out, don't worry, but we have to stay calm and try to think straight. Come on, let's go see if Jacob is okay—maybe he's found something that will help us."

The four boys went around to the open window which, thankfully, the doctor had not noticed as he drove away. Jacob was busy at work inside. The boys had to tiptoe to reach the frame and see how he was doing, and saw that he had completely torn apart the doctor's office. There would be a lot of cleaning that would have to take place for the doctor not to realize the boys had been there.

"Jacob, slow down!" Caleb yelled inside.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Kill or Cure?

Meanwhile, Jacob had indeed found "something" inside. He had found jars and bottles with labels that claimed to do things beyond your wildest dreams. As there was still a fair bit of sunlight streaming through the window, he was able to see things clearly in the room. Everything seemed normal. The doctor's calendar showed nothing out of the ordinary, although Jacob did have a hard time deciphering some of the notes scribbled there! The gray metal filing cabinets that lined the walls still had the keys in their locks. Jacob opened the drawers easily. He read the names from the top drawer. Archer, Black, Dixon.

Pushing that drawer back in, he pulled open the middle one. This drawer was mostly names that started with H and J, so he moved to the back. Hill, Jackson, Jung—that's it!

He pulled out his file. Jacob Jung. Date of Birth: 7/10/2010. Yeah, that was him all right—it was definitely his file. Pulling up a chair beside the doctor's desk, he opened the file and started to read.

This is all old, he thought. The files included the time he had to have stitches when he fell off his bike (his mom had insisted on removing his training wheels, even though he had told her it was much too soon). And then the time he'd had an allergic reaction to a new brand of detergent his mom had bought. That had been awful—he was covered in tiny little pin pricks from head to toe. He felt itchy just thinking about it! Beginning to enjoy himself now, he made himself comfortable. He leaned back in the chair and crossed his legs on

the desk in front of him. Then he heard a noise.

"What was that?" he started, sitting upright at the desk. Then he noticed. What he'd earlier assumed to be simply a wall was actually sliding doors; doors that had been covered perfectly in wallpaper to conceal behind them a huge walk-in closet. He must have inadvertently hit the button to open the doors when he put his feet on the desk. He stood and walked toward the now exposed closet.

Wow! The sight that greeted him was astounding! As he walked along the side of the room (it was far more fitting that it be called a room, as it was much too big to be a closet), he saw more jars, bottles, tubs, and every other type of container that you could possibly imagine. They were enclosed in glass shelves of display cases that were attached by built-in locks. The jars on the top shelf were the largest and were filled to capacity with different colored liquids.

The containers on the second and third shelves were slightly smaller and again filled with different colors of liquid. Jacob noticed that the bottom shelf held empty containers in lots of different sizes, some of which were similar to the one his acne cream was in at home.

So this is the doctor's dispensary, thought Jacob, looking more closely at the jars on the other side of the glass that were labeled very clearly and precisely. His eyes traveled along the top shelf of the left side of the room. Unbearable Itch read the first label. Hair Thinner read the next. Followed by Extremely Large and Flaky Dandruff; Chronic Diarrhea; Horrible Breath; Incontinence (Jacob shuddered when he read that one); Smelly Armpits; Rotting, Brown Teeth; Green, Pus-Filled Pimples; Yellow, Pus-Filled Pimples; Huge Whiteheads; and finally, Triple Combination Pimples.

"That's it." He stopped. "Triple Combination

Pimples—that's what he gave me!"

Glancing further up, Jacob saw a large notice above the shelves that read AFFLICTIONS & AILMENTS. Looking to the other side of the room, he saw that the notice above those shelves read CURES & REMEDIES. The jars on the top shelf were also labeled. Well-Conditioned Hair; Healthy Bowel Movements; Sweet-Smelling Breath; White, Even Teeth; Clear, Perfect Skin. He stopped reading and did a double take. Clear, Perfect Skin—a dream come true! He'd check it out later—for now he had to concentrate on creating a plan.

This Dr. Blair sure was weird. He must have discovered a way of bottling these illnesses and now he spends his time getting them into children's bodies. What a creep! Jacob saw syringes lying beside jars that had the name of the illness printed on the label, with the word "vaccine" added below. More than a little anxious now, Jacob was almost

afraid to look at the third shelf.

He swallowed and looked down. The first one read: Partial or Complete Paralysis. Jacob felt sick. Loss of Sight read the second. Jacob could feel the skin start to prickle on the back of his neck. He looked at the third: Terminal Illness. He knew, almost before he turned, what he would see when he looked at the corresponding right-hand shelf. He tried to open it where it attached at the lock, like a filing cabinet, but it was locked. Keys for the cures? He searched the countertops.

"Jacob?" said a nearby voice. "Jacob are you in there?"

Jacob exhaled deeply with relief. It was Caleb—thank goodness for that!

"In here, Caleb, but prepare yourself. This guy's pretty much Dr. Death. I'm not joking—you'll never believe what I just found."

Caleb came into the dispensary, closely followed by Santiago and Xavier. Jacob indicated to the

AFFLICTIONS & AILMENTS
HUGE WHITEHEADS
ITCH
GREEN PUS-FILLED PIMPLES
HORRID BREATH
HAIR THINNER
FLAKY DANDRUFF
ITCH
BROWN TEETH
HAIR THINNER
FLAKY DANDRUFF
HUGE WHITEHEADS
YELLOW PUS-FILLED PIMPLES

signs above each wall of shelves and left the boys to read while he went back into the doctor's office to sit quietly at the desk. Xavier was the first to join him, having seen all he needed to in Dr. Death's Chamber of Horrors. Neither boy spoke, waiting instead for their two friends to absorb everything they had just seen.

"I knew the guy was a weirdo," said Jacob. "But I didn't expect to find all this stuff. How could anyone do such terrible things? I mean, what does he do—inject illnesses into kids then pretend to be concerned when they get really sick? And does he cure them right at the last minute or does he… does he just…" Jacob couldn't finish the sentence. It was too awful to think about.

"Anyone got any ideas?" asked Caleb. "What are we going to do?"

"I will be taking one of those CURES & REMEDIES with me." Xavier approached the side with the cures.

"You're not going to have much luck," Jacob warned.

"What do you mean—" Xavier tried to lift the lid of a locked shelf.

"I've already looked for the keys," Jacob said.

Xavier began frantically searching under the mess of papers and files on the doctor's desk. Jacob stood to help, but it only took the rest of them a short time to realize this was useless because the doctor probably had the keys with him.

"We're going to have to think of a plan," Jacob said.

"Again?" whined Xavier.

"I want him to experience what he's put us through! Revenge! I want to replace those viles." Jacob pointed to the doctor's desk. The doctor had several of the viles from the CURES & REMEDIES shelf on his desk.

"We can come back tomorrow! Schedule an appointment," said Xavier. "Then we can break

back in here again."

"I'm sure he'd be delighted to see us," Caleb said sarcastically.

"He can't reject us, can he?" Xavier argued.

"We're gonna need a key to that shelf," said Jacob.

"One of us. Just one of us should come back tomorrow," said Santiago.

"I'll do it," Jacob said reluctantly, much quicker than the other boys.

"We could all skip school again," Caleb joked.

"I'm sure your mom would never know," Jacob said sarcastically.

"C'mon, your mom is just as curious and likely to find out, Jacob," said Caleb.

"I'll tell my mom I need a checkup for my acne. She will be more than happy to have another excuse to visit the doctor."

"I don't think this is our best option, Jacob," Santiago said. "He will certainly be expecting

something after seeing us in the parking lot…"

"All the better," Jacob said with a sneaky grin.

The boys looked incredulously at Jacob.

"What?" continued Jacob. "It's better if he suspects us. Keep him on his toes. I can have the keys before he even knows I'm here!"

"That's impossible," said Xavier. "He will have a list of appointments before the day begins. He will be expecting you."

"Let's just break the glass! We can take all the CURES & REMEDIES we need," said Caleb.

"Then he will definitely know who did it! Not only that, that's not going to fix anything. He will only keep doing this to more kids," Santiago argued.

"We have to replace the viles!" Jacob said.

"Using what?" Xavier asked. "If he sees someone has broken his glass shelves, then he definitely won't trust the viles we replace on his desk."

"Think about it. We can take care of our

illnesses and we won't have to mess with him again," said Jacob. "And he can't call the cops on us for breaking and entering, or he will expose himself!"

"I'm for making sure this doesn't happen to anyone else. Dr. Death deserves to experience what he has put us through!" said Caleb.

"I will have no problem convincing my mom to come back here tomorrow," Jacob said.

The rest of the boys agreed they should return to school the next day. Two days away would likely lead to a phone call home. Jacob replaced his file in the filing cabinet and he and his three friends opened the window and crept out into the night.

As the boys neared their neighborhood, they went their separate ways and Jacob began to realize he would be the one replacing jars and spending the time sneaking behind the doctor's back in the office.

"I guess I'll see you on the other side," Jacob

said as he separated from everyone to go to his house.

"You better not start fixing your ailments before the rest of us can start fixing our own," said Caleb. He smiled at Jacob. "But no really, be careful tomorrow! Don't get caught!"

Jacob raised his head proudly, "You won't have to worry about me."

Jacob practiced his fake cough the rest of the way home.

CHAPTER NINE

Taste of His Own Medicine

Today was the day. Jacob was going to be responsible for Dr. Death finally getting what he deserved.

"Jacob, you're late for breakfast," his mom called from downstairs.

"I'm not feeling too well, Mom," he said when he walked downstairs. Jacob's cough was sounding more and more convincing.

"Oh no," said Ms. Jung. "What's the matter?"

"I have this terrible cough. I'm feeling pretty stuffy."

She walked over to feel his forehead for a fever, and Jacob winced from her touching the sore

bumps scattered on his forehead.

"Hm, well I guess a trip to the doctor wouldn't hurt."

"To the doctor?"

"Yes, you just eat your breakfast then we will go in."

"Actually mom, I feel like I should rest first. Can we go this afternoon?"

"Is it that bad?"

"Yeah, actually, I think I'll take my breakfast upstairs and finish it. Then maybe try to nap."

"Okay, if you insist.

Jacob could hear a rise of excitement in her voice after she realized she would be able to see the doctor again. He was ready to go upstairs and turn his TV on, then hide under the covers.

As Jacob walked out of the kitchen, the fire extinguisher beside the fireplace in the living room caught his eye. He knew then what to do.

Around an hour after lunch, Jacob's mom woke him from a nap and took him to the doctor. The waiting room was just as busy as before. Jacob noticed this time more women were there, some seeming to have no visible cough or illness. He waited close to the front door as he thought out his plan. When he was called back by the nurse, he planned to excuse himself to the bathroom. Then he would pull the fire alarm, hoping to buy time to find the keys and replace the desk jars.

It annoyed Jacob to watch his mom put on lipstick in her small makeup mirror after she had returned the completed paperwork to the front desk. After she had adjusted more parts of her makeup than Jacob knew existed, the nurse finally called him back.

"Hm…normal temperature," said the nurse as she glanced at Jacob after he sat in the chair in the middle of the exam room. "The doctor will be with you shortly," she said as she began briskly walking

out of the room on to see another patient.

"I'll actually follow you out," said Jacob. "Gotta use the restroom."

The nurse overexplained where to find the restroom, as Jacob knew this office well already. He could hear the doctor enter an exam room down the hall. When the nurse was out of sight, Jacob looked into Dr. Blair's office. Nobody was there so he shut the door behind him. The doctor had taken his lab coat with him, and Jacob was sure the keys had to be in his pocket! Jacob frantically searched the doctor's desk, moving over piles of files and papers. They weren't there! How could he check the doctor's lab coat pocket?

Then he turned toward the last place he was going to look: the satchel draped across the back of the doctor's chair. He saw a glimmer from inside the pocket. It was the keys!

Now to figure out which one opened the shelves in the hidden room. He knew he was running out

of time. Looking both ways, he jumped out of the room and pulled the fire alarm that was across the hall. He ran back in the office and hid under the desk while people frantically searched for the exits and the source of the alarm. He hoped the doctor wouldn't try to run back into his office to save any remedies or disease tubs and catch him. He waited for the sound of footsteps in the hallway to calm down.

When the coast was clear, he started fiddling with the keys as he ran to the shelf titled CURES & REMEDIES. He looked at the keyhole and tried to compare it to the different size keys on the doctor's key ring. When he finally found the right one, after several attempts of keys that wouldn't turn, he opened the shelf to the tubs. He was going to stash away some remedies for him and his friends, then swap the labels on all the bottles and tubs that the doctor had.

He gently removed each label and fixed it to

its new container. He repeated the process until every one of the ailments had been switched with a cure. He even replaced the jars on the doctor's desk. Everything was returned to its proper place, and Jacob stood back to survey his handiwork. He couldn't believe how quickly he had done it!

Leaving the secret room, Jacob once more pressed the button on the desk and closed the doors. He lifted the bag containing the stolen cures and he slipped out through the back door of the office. Jacob was sure his mother was worrying about not seeing him among the crowd that had rushed into the parking lot. He saw her at the front asking the nurses if they could check the bathroom again.

"Mom, I'm fine," he said, as he walked up to her seemingly out of nowhere.

"Oh, thank goodness you're all right," she said.

"I'm feeling much better, Mom. I don't think we should stay and wait for all of this."

"What changed so fast, Jacob?

"We should leave. This will take forever, and I'll probably feel better with some rest."

"Are you sure?" she asked, seeming disappointed as she looked from Jacob to the doctor. "Okay, if you're sure, let's go home."

CHAPTER TEN

Doctor Yuck!

It was English, Jacob's last period on a Friday afternoon. A month had passed since the events took place at the doctor's office, and all four boys were completely cured. The sun was streaming in the classroom window as the boys listened to their teacher sum up the final scene from Macbeth. Xavier pushed a note toward Jacob.

Where are you going tonight?

Jacob smiled before writing back.

Meeting Emma at 7 and going to see a movie—will you and Olivia be there?

Before Xavier had time to scribble his reply, the final bell rang and both boys grabbed their

books and bags before running happily out of the classroom and into the sunshine.

The receptionist took another sip of her coffee and turned the pages of her newspaper to the Help Wanted pages. She was startled by her buzzer.

"Yes, Dr. Blair?" she said with a sigh.

"Would you bring me my coffee?" he rasped.

"Certainly, doctor."

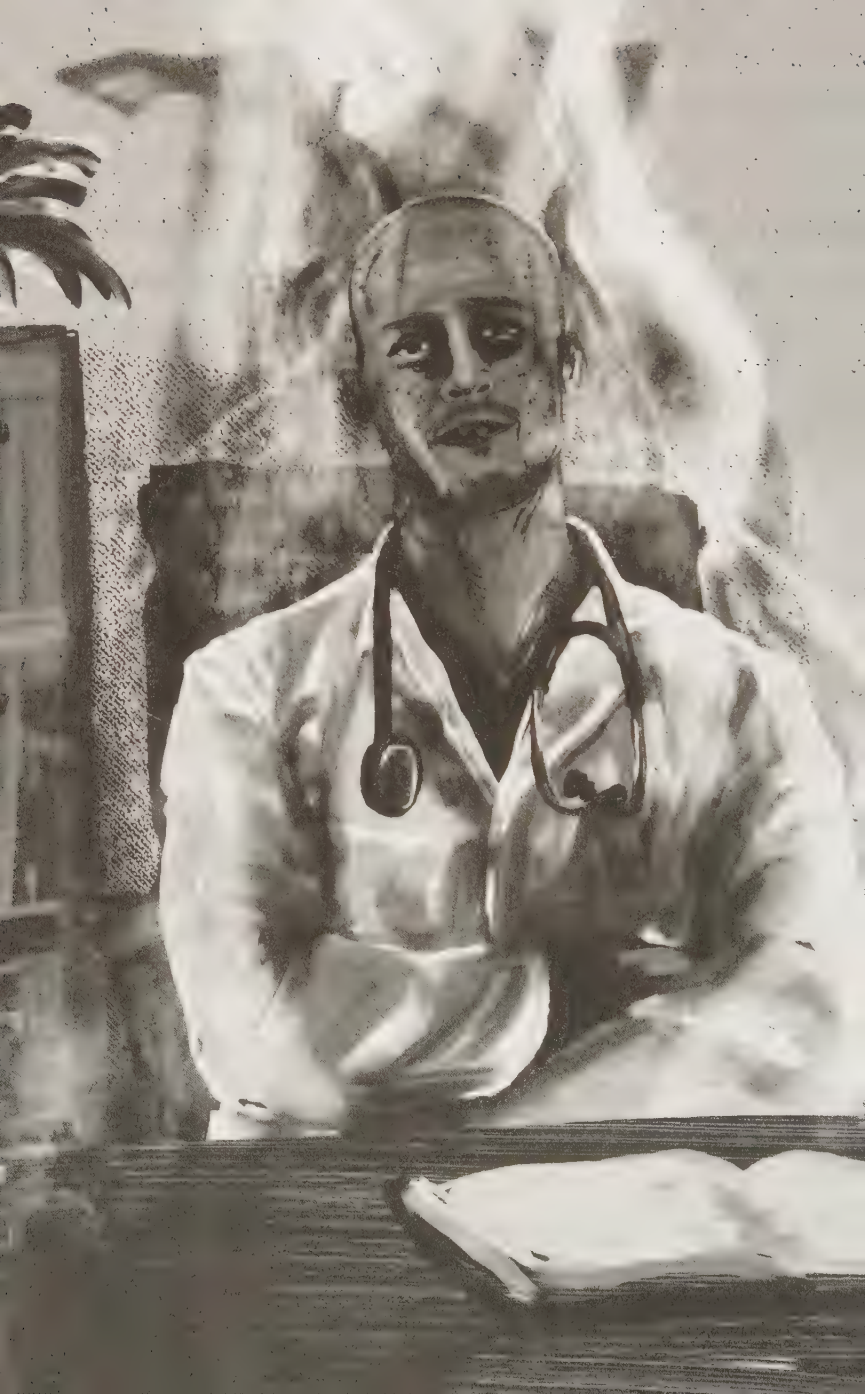
She got up from her chair and walked into the kitchen. She put some coffee and cookies on a tray and walked towards his office. She dreaded this part. Taking a deep breath, she knocked twice on the door, turned the handle, and went in. The stench hit her as soon as she opened the door. The doctor, seated behind his desk, was barely recognizable as the smooth, sophisticated Dr. Blair she had originally come to work for. The man seated behind the desk was now completely bald, his eyes dull and lifeless, and his once white and

even teeth now reduced to brown, rotting stumps. He seemed to have shrunk in size and appeared much thinner than he had been before. *Probably due to his frequent visits to the toilet*, the receptionist thought as she placed his coffee before him. The poor man suffers from chronic bouts of diarrhea.

He muttered his thanks and she gratefully left the room. *I really have to find another job soon*, she thought as she walked slowly back to reception through the deserted waiting room. There hadn't been a patient in here for weeks now, and who could blame them? The change in the doctor in such a short period of time was really quite unbelievable. He looked awful, he smelled awful, and he was so gruff in his manner that he frightened people away.

She sat down at her desk again and started to type. "I am writing in response to your recent job listing..."

Dr. Blair pressed the button on his desk and



slowly made his way into his secret room. He unscrewed the jar labeled Shiny, Well-Conditioned Hair and greedily swallowed a large spoonful. He stopped to scratch his face, his dirty, jagged nails accidentally catching the head of a pimple, causing green pus to spurt from it and run down the side of his face and drip onto his collar. Lifting the jar labeled Healthy Bowel Movements, he wondered aloud, "Maybe I'll have two spoonfuls today—maybe that will help…"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Carnival

Jacob didn't tell the rest of the boys that he had stashed extra cures into his pockets of the most beneficial viles on the CURES & REMEDIES shelf. He was going to use them for the carnival he had been anticipating that night. This is where he would see Emma Summers again.

He thought his stashed cures were sure to make him as handsome as Dr. Death had been before his sudden change of appearance. The cures on the shelves in the office were too tempting not to take for his own. In his pocket were Shiny, Well-Conditioned Hair; Healthy Bowel Movements; Clear, Perfect Skin; Sweet Smelling Breath; and White Teeth. He hid them in his backpack so

his mom wouldn't see until he could use them. Everyone was going to the carnival, and he expected Emma to be there because it was the town's most important event!

"Bye, Mom!" he yelled as ran toward the front door.

"Wait a minute, Jacob! How are you getting there?"

"We're meeting at Caleb's house, Mom!" he yelled over his shoulder at his mom as he opened the door to Santiago and Xavier waiting for him.

"I might see you there. Try not to avoid me!"

She always assumed the worst.

"You look good, Jacob!" Xavier said. "Look at that skin! It's as if Dr. Death never even met you!"

When they reached the end of the cul-de-sac, Caleb's mom was already in the car. Surprisingly, she wasn't complaining about waiting, as Jacob would expect his mother to do. The boys piled into the backseat with Caleb in the passenger seat.

"Is that doctor still working there?" Xavier asked.

"I heard he was moving. A new doctor is coming to take his place."

"Are you boys talking about Dr. Blair," Caleb's mother asked.

Caleb nodded.

"It's a shame what happened to him," she said.

"What do you mean?" Jacob asked.

"Just him changing so quickly..." she said with a sigh.

The carnival was busy at first glance, and Jacob couldn't recognize anyone because they were all moving so quickly from ride to ride. It wasn't until waiting in line at the Gravitron that he saw Emma Summers standing nearby with some friends. She smiled at him.

"Hey, follow me," Xavier said after noticing. He casually started talking to Emma's friend, Lizzy.

Emma joked about Jacob's fall. He hoped they would have more things to talk about by now.

"Yeah that was a beautiful flower I saw in the bush," he said. He regretted this when he said it.

Emma giggled. "Sure seemed like it. Glad you weren't hurt."

Soon they were all being ushered onto the ride. While the Gravitron was going fastest, he thought he felt Emma's hand brush against his.

"How'd it go?" Xavier asked as they walked off the ride.

"It went good," said Jacob. "Except we only talked about my embarrassing fall the other day. She could have at least mentioned the movie."

Xavier couldn't contain his laughter. "You're telling me you didn't even ask her to hang out again?"

It was right when he asked this, Jacob would later worry if she heard Xavier's comment. Just then Emma Summers tapped his shoulder as the

boys stared incredulously.

"Want to go see another movie with me later this week?" she asked with a smile.

Jacob nodded, too stunned to speak.

She only stayed long enough to ask the question and then immediately returned to her friends laughing nervously. Jacob didn't care though, he was just glad they made another plan.

As she walked back to her friends, the rest of the boys patted him on the back and Jacob turned bright red.

"I can't believe it," said Xavier. "You actually got yourself another date."

"I never thought I would see the day honestly," said Caleb.

Jacob rolled his eyes and looked back over at Emma. If he was being honest, he could hardly believe it either. If they hadn't figured out how to deal with Dr. Death he may never have had a

chance with the girl of his dreams. Jacob had gone from average teenager, to basketball star, to secret town hero and getting a second date with Emma Summers was just the icing on the cake.

"Thank you, Dr. Blair," he said under his breath.

Read on to enjoy an excerpt from another haunting title in the Creepers series:

Mirror, Mirror

by Edgar J. Hyde

Illustrations by Chloe Tyler

CHAPTER ONE

The Ballerina

Sophie stood, transfixed. The doll wearing the silver, sparkling dress twirled gracefully on her stand. To her, the doll was utterly magical, and she decided then and there that she had to have it. She would not leave the store that day without the ballerina. From the corner of her eye, she looked at her mother and father. They were both deep in conversation with the owner of the store—an elderly man named Mr. Larson, whom Sophie had known since she had first come to the shop as a little girl with her parents and two older sisters. Her eldest sister, Maya, was perched on top of a pile of orange crates in the corner, pensively staring out of the window. Sophie shuddered when she looked at Maya. There could be

spiders as big as your arm inside those crates. Not that they would scare Maya—she wasn't afraid of things like that.

Sophie's eyes left Maya and traveled to where Dani sat, head bowed, as always, devouring every word of every book she could get her hands on. Sophie herself had never understood this attraction to words that her middle sister had. Although she enjoyed reading enough for a seven-year-old, she preferred instead to stare at the glossy magazines in the checkout lanes at the grocery store. Sophie suddenly became aware that her (at least she already thought of it as hers) ballerina was no longer moving. The music had stopped, so Sophie bent forward to pick up the box and restart the music.

Mr. and Mrs. Molina had decided to enter the store after seeing the beautiful mirror with a golden frame hanging above the long store counter. Mrs. Molina was so taken aback by the mirror's beauty, she had gasped aloud. Her husband had been a little

more noncommittal until he had checked the price tag, but upon finding it was within their price range, he agreed with his wife that it would look very nice above the fireplace of their newly decorated study.

"Come on, girls," said Mr. Molina, "it's time to leave."

Maya and Dani joined their parents as they said their goodbyes to old Mr. Lawson.

"I'll have it delivered the day after tomorrow," he said. "That'll give you enough time to decide exactly where you're going to hang it." He laughed.

Mrs. Molina turned and walked toward where Sophie still stood. "What's this?" her mother said with a smile. It was just like Sophie to become fixated on the prettiest thing in the store.

"Mom," Sophie said as she looked up into her mother's eyes, "I promise I'll give up my allowance forever if I can just have this ballerina."

Mrs. Molina hid her smile as she lifted the little music box to check for a price. *Forever,* thought Mrs.

Molina. *What rash promises kids will make—all for a five-dollar music box.* That was the price scrawled in large blue letters on the card attached to the foot of the ballerina. Mrs. Molina looked at her husband. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders before ruffling Sophie's hair.

"Go ahead and get it, sweetie, but I think maybe one week without allowance would be long enough."

"Thank you! You've made me the happiest girl in the whole world!" shouted Sophie. "I'll take such good care of her, I promise!"

Sophie was breathless with the excitement of it all and practically ran to the counter to watch Mr. Lawson wrap her treasure.

"Well ain't that a coincidence," said Mr. Lawson as he picked up the little box. "This here music box came from the same place as the mirror your mom and dad just bought. Good taste you've got in this family, eh?"

The Molinas listened to what the old man had to

say and looked interested enough in the history of the mirror. They had heard his stories before, stories that they felt were embellished with just enough romance and danger as to entice potential customers into parting with their money. Not that they doubted there wasn't at least an element of truth in what Mr. Lawson said—it was just that he tended to stretch the truth a little at times.

"Seen a lot, that mirror," he'd said earlier, and now he said the same of the little ballerina. "I wonder what stories she'd tell if only she could speak." He winked at Sophie as he finished wrapping the box in tissue paper.

Sophie smiled back at Mr. Lawson and curtsied. She'd read somewhere that it was very ladylike for a girl to curtsy. She then took the box from the old man and thanked him graciously before joining her sisters at the door of the shop.

"Should have been born three hundred years ago, that one," Mr. Lawson said with a smile.

Mrs. Molina smiled back as she surveyed her three daughters. *How,* she thought to herself for the millionth time, *was it possible to have three children so utterly different from one another?* Maya was fourteen years old and in her freshman year of high school. She'd been blessed with good looks and long gorgeous hair in perfect condition. She then looked toward Dani. Dani spent every waking hour (and even some when she should have been sleeping) with her head bent over whatever book she was currently reading. And Sophie—pretty, angelic, little Sophie—well, maybe not so angelic sometimes. Her lips looked pinker than normal, and she couldn't quite tell if it was the naturally dark color of her eyelashes that made them look so long today or if the little girl had helped herself to her mascara. She decided to look into that little matter when they got home.

The Molina family left the antique shop having said their final goodbyes to Mr. Lawson, amid promises of a Tuesday delivery.

"I'm glad we stopped in there," Mr. Molina said to his wife as he started the car. "Now, let's go home and have lunch."

As the car climbed the hill on the last leg of the journey, Oatlands, the family's home, came into view. Maya found their house absolutely breathtaking. The house had been built over two hundred years ago and though seemingly imposing, Maya thought it always looked friendly and welcoming as you approached. At this point, the Molina family did not use all the rooms of Oatlands, having only moved into the house three months earlier. Mrs. Molina was in no rush with the decor. "Better to wait and buy exactly what you want rather than rushing and getting it all wrong," she was fond of saying.

Maya loved to explore and though she had spent most of her spare time since they moved here doing just that, she felt sure there were still parts of the house she hadn't been in. Mr. Molina had barely

stopped the car when Maya opened the door and got out.

"And just where do you think you're going?" Mrs. Molina asked Dani, since she had been too late in asking the same question to Maya, who was by now out of earshot.

Dani paused, one leg already halfway out of the car. "I just have to finish the chapter I was reading this morning, Mom, and then I'll find out what happened to Julianne. I was at a really crucial point when you called me downstairs, and I couldn't concentrate in the store. Please, Mom, just half an hour, then I'll come and help make lunch."

Dani smiled winningly at her mother. Dani had a smile that could charm the birds off the trees, and it worked on Mrs. Molina every time.

"Go on, then," she sighed. "Maybe the next time you're at the library you could get some cookbooks. If you're as interested in that subject as everything else, who knows, I may even get a break from the kitchen."

Mr. Molina got out of the car and helped Sophie unfasten her seat belt.

"Lunch will be ready in about an hour, so come down when you're called, Sophie," Mrs. Molina said.

"Okay, Mom," replied Sophie with a smile. She then stood on her tiptoes to kiss her mother. "And thanks again, this is the best present ever." She turned toward her father, kissed him too, and climbed the stairs to her room.

CHAPTER TWO

Behind the Mirror

"Where on earth is the first aid kit?" asked Mrs. Molina to no one in particular. Mr. Molina had apparently cut his finger on a corner of the new mirror. It had been delivered, as promised, on Tuesday, and Mr. Molina had spent most of the week trying to hang it on the wall above the fireplace. Eventually, after a lot of banging, taking down, muttering, and some looks from his wife, he had managed to get the mirror hanging in just the right spot on Saturday. On his way down the ladder, however, he had snagged his thumb on a jagged part of the frame surrounding the mirror, hence the search for the first aid kit.

Mrs. Molina came out of the kitchen carrying the thought-to-be-missing kit and proceeded into the study where her injured husband sat feeling very sorry for himself. She wiped his finger and applied a bandage. She also complimented him, telling him what an amazing job he had done hanging the mirror. A few minutes later, a bandaged Mr. Molina was smiling again. His wife knew that his ego only needed flattering before he would be back to his normal self. He practically strutted around the room, turning from every corner to see what the mirror looked like from that angle.

"Yes, it does look pretty good up there, if I do say so myself," he said, as if he had made the whole mirror rather than just hanging it from a nail in the wall. Mrs. Molina, however, knew when to keep quiet and merely mumbled her agreement.

"Once we're actually using the room, maybe we can buy wall lights. If we put them at a certain

angle, it would make the mirror really pop," said Mr. Molina.

"Yes, dear," agreed his wife, as she ushered him out of the room. "But that's after we have the chimney swept, get the gas hooked up, and pick out a suitable grate for the fireplace. I'm afraid there's a lot left to do to that room before we can start using it."

The three girls entered the study and they too had admired the mirror. It really was quite imposing hanging there, though little Sophie was too small to see her reflection unless she stood on her tiptoes.

"Come on, you two," said Maya, "there is much to see and do and so little time to do it all."

Dani, book tucked under her arm, followed her older sister from the room. Not that she was going to do any exploring—outside of exploring chapter nine of her book. That left Sophie alone in the room. She soon worked out that if she sat on the

top of her father's leather-covered desk, she could see herself in the mirror. Today she was wearing "Crimson Tide" nail polish. Her mom had said she could wear bright colors when she wasn't in school, and she had spent the better part of the morning applying this particular bright color to her tiny, but perfectly shaped, fingernails.

She picked up a glossy magazine and started to read from the "Terrific Hair Tips" page. She carefully positioned her fingers so that she could see the tiny little red nails glint back at her from the mirror. She decided to read aloud. She had watched, fascinated, as her Sunday School teacher read to the class each Sunday, her long nails curled around the book. Before long, she reached for her little music box, the ballerina now restored to her former glory. Sophie had painted the little doll's lips and tiny little fingertips with one of her nail polishes.

She wound up the box and placed it beside

her on the desk and, as the music began to play, she returned to reading the "Coloring Commandments" section of the article. She was wondering how her mother would react if Sophie were to dye some of her curls purple when all of a sudden she thought she felt someone watching her. She looked up, thinking she would see only her own reflection, and was horrified to see not her own face but that of an older girl in the mirror. Sophie sat very still and blinked hard, then turned her head quickly to look behind her. There was no one else in the room. The ballerina pirouetted and turned gracefully to the music, somehow lending an air of complete unreality to the whole scene.

Sophie tried to get off the desk and go and get her parents, or her sisters, but before she could do so the girl in the mirror turned her eyes away from Sophie to look at another scene that was unfolding behind her. Terrified, Sophie could not take her eyes away from the mirror, nor could she get off

the desk. Her eyes followed the girl's, and the scene before her in the mirror completely changed.

There were thousands upon thousands of people, all jostling and pushing for a place in the crowd. Sophie saw a large wooden construction, some sort of scaffolding, which was draped entirely in black cloth and strewn with straw. A lady approached the scaffolding, a young and beautiful lady, accompanied by four attendants. In her hands, the woman clutched a prayer book, and as she approached the scaffolding, she turned and gave the book to one of her attendants. The four women were weeping, and Sophie could sense the fear in the atmosphere.

The crowd was becoming agitated now, jeering and shouting, fists punching the air, children being lifted onto shoulders. The beautiful lady, her hair bound high, knelt at the block on the scaffolding and unclasped her necklace. A hooded man spoke briefly to the lady and knelt to retrieve his hidden

ax from the straw and raised it over the woman's head. Sophie covered her eyes when she realized what was about to happen. She couldn't help but glance at the young girl in the mirror and thought she saw tears on her eyes too. Sophie screamed and no longer frozen to the desk, she jumped down and fled the study as quickly as her young legs would allow.

"Mom, Dad, anyone! Help! Help!" she shouted as she ran along the hallway. She almost jumped out of her skin when she bumped into Maya, who had just come from the kitchen.

"Whoa, Sophie, what's gotten into you?" Maya clasped the young girl firmly by the shoulders. "Calm down and tell me what this is all about."

"Maya, it was horrible! There was a man in a hood! He had an axe! They were glad she died. And a little girl was so sad; I think she was crying, too."

"Hold on, Sophie, just hold on. Were you watching a scary movie? Because if you were,

I'm telling Mom. You know those give you nightmares."

"It wasn't a movie, Maya. Please don't yell at me. I didn't do anything wrong—it was the mirror! I was just looking in the mirror and something horrible happened! I don't understand it, but I'm scared."

By this time, Dani had appeared and stopped to find out what all the commotion was about.

"Come on, Sophie, come into the kitchen and sit down. Maybe if you calm down a little you can tell us exactly what happened." Dani took her little sister by the hand and led her into the comfort of the warm kitchen. The three sisters sat around the table.

"Okay, Sophie, start at the beginning and maybe we can figure this whole thing out," said Maya.

And so she did. The two older girls looked at one another.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you've been reading up on some history, Henry VIII or something," said Dani. "It sounds just like what happened when one of his wives was being… beheaded."

"Beheaded?" wailed Sophie.

Maya dug Dani hard in the ribs. "Don't scare her any more than she already is," she chided her sister. "Come on, Sophie, let's go back to the study and see what we can find."

Sophie was aghast. "I can't go back in there! Please, Maya, don't make me go back into the study; it's too scary. Please, I'll do anything you say, just don't make me go back into that room!"

Maya placed an arm around her young sister's shoulders. "I won't make you do anything you don't want to, don't worry. Dani and I will go. You stay here, and we'll be right back."

Sophie wiped her eyes, forgetting for a moment the eyeshadow she had so carefully applied that

morning, which she had now smeared all over her tear-stained face. "Where are Mom and Dad?" she asked.

"They just left to go to the grocery store and run some other errands. Maybe it's for the best. We don't really want them seeing you this upset until we know exactly what's going on."

Dani poured her little sister a glass of milk and put two chocolate cookies on a plate for her. After having made sure she was all right to be left alone for a few minutes, the two older sisters left the kitchen and made their way toward the study. Maya pushed open the door. The two girls were greeted by silence, the smell of old leather, and a general air of peace. Dani bent over and picked up her sister's music box from where it had fallen on the floor.

"Look, she must have dropped it when she ran from the room," Dani said.

Maya nodded. "She must have been really

scared if she left her ballerina behind."

Maya walked toward the mirror, looking for any clues as to what had taken place in the study only minutes before. The mirror looked like a regular mirror to her. She stood on her tiptoes and touched around the edges, trying to feel if there could possibly be something behind it. She turned away from the mirror then turned back quickly to look at her reflection—she only saw her own face staring back at her.

I feel a little silly doing this, she thought, shaking her head. She didn't want to dislodge the mirror from its place on the wall after all the trouble her father had getting it to hang just right. She turned to Dani to see if she had found anything when she spotted something lying on the carpet just in front of where she stood. She bent closer and saw that it was a few pieces of straw with tiny spots of blood splattered on them!

"There's no way," she told herself, picking up

the straw and stuffing it quickly into the pocket of her jeans.

Dani turned and asked, "What did you say?"

Maya was unaware she had spoken out loud. "Nothing, nothing, Dani, I just think we're wasting our time here. Doesn't seem like there's anything to find, so let's go back to Sophie in the kitchen."

Maya, for the time being, didn't want her younger sister seeing what she had just found, not until she had more time to examine it at least.

"Come on," she said leading the way out of the room, "let's go." She pushed the straw deeper into her pocket then turned back to face her younger sister.

"Dani, sorry about earlier. I didn't mean to yell at you or anything. I mean, I know you're well-read and all that, but I really don't think it's a good idea to plant ideas like that in Sophie's head. She's too young to learn about all that stuff."

"I know, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to," replied Dani. "It's just that, honestly, Maya, it really felt like she could have been describing a scene straight from a history book. I mean, Anne Boleyn died in exactly that way. She had four ladies-in-waiting with her, and her executioner looked just like Sophie described."

Maya shivered involuntarily. "Okay, Dani, I hear what you're saying, but now you're scaring me. Please don't say anything else about this to Sophie. I want to believe her, but I think she must have imagined this whole thing. She must have just seen something on TV that scared her and for some reason she thought of it again when she was in the study."

Dani took the magazine from her sister, pushed open the kitchen door, and went to comfort her younger sister as best as she knew how. Maya once again pushed the pieces of straw deep into her pocket and took a deep breath. She wasn't ready

to share what she had found but she had a sinking feeling that there may actually be something going on with that mirror…

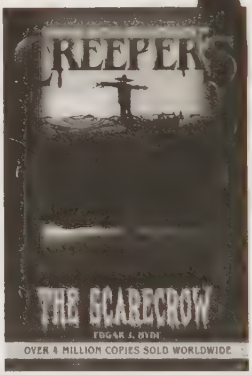
"Where's that music box, Sophie?" she said.

Sophie's words were still indistinguishable from sobs and she couldn't answer.

"You must've been scared to leave that behind. Don't let it get away from you!" Maya said as she pulled it from behind her back.

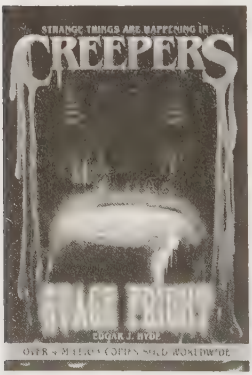
Be sure to check out the oth

Pen Pals



The Scarecrow

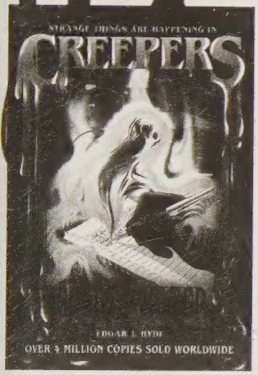
The Piano



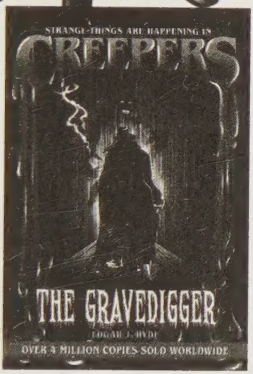
Stage Fright

The Golden Goblet

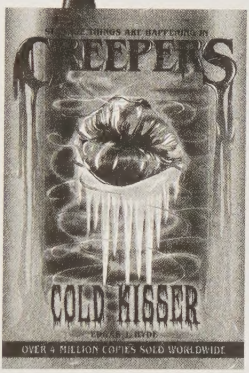
itles in the Creepers series!



Ghost Writer

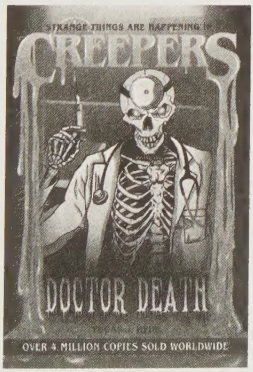


The Gravedigger



Cold Kisser

Mirror, Mirror



Doctor Death

Scan the QR code to watch the Creepers book trailer on YouTube!

CREEPERS

THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW...

Jacob Jung is your average teenager. He loves basketball, hanging with his friends, and even has a crush on the coolest girl in school, Emma Summers. But his average life is suddenly turned upside down after a visit to the charming local doctor. Instead of clearing up his acne as promised, things go horribly awry. Jacob isn't the only one dealing with more symptoms than cures thanks to this mysterious MD. It is up to him and his friends to stop Dr. Death before the whole town is afflicted!

The Creepers Series:

The Piano • Stage Fright • Pen Pals • The Golden Goblet • Ghost Writer
The Gravedigger • The Scarecrow • Cold Kisser • Doctor Death • Mirror, Mirror

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